

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0857

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OREP, OTRA, LA
SUBJECT: STAFFDEL TINKER - ARCHBISHOP HANNAN'S VISIT TO VIENTIANE

REF: BANGKOK 22535

1. ARCHBISHOP PHILIP HANNAN OF NEW ORLEANS ARRIVED VIENTIANE AT 1030 AUGUST 9 AND LEFT AT 1600 AUGUST 9 AS SCHEDULED VIA THAI AIRWAYS. HE WAS MET BY THE CHARGE, TAKEN TO SEE THE BISHOP OF VIENTIANE, GIVEN LUNCH, AND TAKEN BACK TO THE AIRPORT FOR HIS FLIGHT TO BANGKOK.

2. ALTHOUGH NO ARRANGEMENTS HAD BEEN MADE IN ADVANCE, ARCHBISHOP HANNAN AND THE CHARGE FOUND THE BISHOP IN HIS OFFICE NEXT TO VIENTIANE'S SINGLE REMAINING ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. THE BISHOP EXPLAINED THAT HE WAS NOT IN THE HABIT OF USING THE TELEPHONE OR THE OPEN MAILS BECAUSE IT WAS NECESSARY TO BE "PRUDENT." THE BISHOP TOLD US, HOWEVER, THAT THE CHURCH WAS SUBJECT TO NO FORMAL OR DIRECT PRESSURES FROM THE GOVERNMENT. IT WAS NEVERTHELESS DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE TO COME TO SERVICES BECAUSE THERE WAS NO LONGER ANY OFFICIAL DAY OF REST IN LAOS. PEOPLE WERE EXPECTED TO SPEND THEIR SUNDAYS ON NATION-BUILDING PROJECTS. CATHOLIC CHILDREN WERE NOT DISCRIMINATED AGAINST WITH RESPECT TO EDUCATIONAL

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OPPORTUNITIES, BUT THEY WOULD BE EXPECTED TO SHOW A PROPER PRO-GOVERNMENT ATTITUDE IF THEY EXPECTED TO BE ADMITTED TO HIGHER INSTITUTIONS.

3. THE BISHOP TOLD ARCHBISHOP HANNAN THAT THERE WERE FOUR DIOCESES IN LAOS, ONE OF WHICH, LUANG PRABANG, WAS DEFUNCT. THE OTHER THREE, VIENTIANE, SAVANNAKHET,

AND PAKSE, HAD BISHOPS AND A FEW CLERGY. THERE WERE NO LONGER ANY FOREIGN PRIESTS IN THE COUNTRY. THERE WERE ABOUT 100 NUNS ORGANIZED IN THREE ORDERS: SECULAR, OBLATES, AND SISTERS OF CHARITY. ALL THE FORMER RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS HAD BEEN TAKEN OVER BY THE GOVERNMENT. THERE HAD NEVER BEEN ANY CHURCH-SPONSORED HOSPITALS.

4. ARCHBISHOP HANNAN GAVE THE BISHOP THE BEST WISHES OF THE AMERICAN REDEMPTORIST FATHERS IN BANGKOK. THE ARCHBISHOP LATER COMMENTED TO THE CHARGE THAT THE BISHOP'S QUIET, LOW-PROFILE METHOD OF OPERATION SEEMED WELL SUITED TO THE CURRENT CHURCH-STATE SITUATION IN LAOS.

5. AT LUNCH, ARCHBISHOP HANNAN SAID THAT HIS VISIT TO VIET NAM HAD GONE WELL BUT THAT HE HAD BEEN STRUCK BY THE NUMEROUS DIFFICULTIES, MANY OF THEM SELF-IMPOSED, WHICH THE VIETNAMESE FACED. "AFTER WHAT WE HAVE SEEN, IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY THAT VIET-NAM WAS A SUCCESS." HE SPECIFICALLY TOOK ISSUE WITH WHAT SOME RECENT AMERICAN VISITORS HAD SAID ABOUT THE WILLINGNESS OF INDIVIDUAL VIETNAMESE TO GO TO THE NEW ECONOMIC ZONES IN THE SOUTH. THE ARCHBISHOP SAID THAT THE ZONES WERE DREADED BY THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE.

6. ARCHBISHOP HANNAN SAID THAT HE HAD TAKEN PARTICULAR ISSUE WITH THE VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS HE HAD MET OVER THE CONFIDENTIAL

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SRV'S TREATMENT OF THE HMONGS. HE SAID HE HAD TOLD THEM THAT GENOCIDAL OPPRESSION OF THE HMONGS COULD NEVER BE ACCEPTED BY THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

7. THE ARCHBISHOP'S COMMENTS ON US-SRV NORMALIZATION ARE BEING TRANSMITTED SEPTTEL.
ROBERTS

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